

STATE OF MAINE  
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

DOCKET NO. 2002-140

October 2, 2002

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
Management Audit of Northern  
Utilities, Inc.'s Customer Service  
And Investigation to Implement  
Service Quality Incentive Plan

ORDER REVISING CREDIT  
LINE IVR MESSAGE AND  
PERFORMANCE MEASURE-  
MENT STARTING POINT

Welch, Chairman; Nugent and Diamond, Commissioners

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**I. SUMMARY**

We approve Northern Utilities, Inc.'s (Northern) revised Interactive Voice Response System (IVR) message and performance measurement starting point for its credit and collection line.

**II. BACKGROUND**

On May 16, 2002, we issued an order initiating a management audit of Northern's customer services and establishing interim call response standards and penalties to apply to Northern's credit and collection line call response performance beginning May 1, 2002. See *Order Initiating Management Audit and Investigation of Service Quality Incentive Plan (May 16, 2002)*. The standards and penalties were proposed by agreement of Staff, Northern and the Public Advocate (OPA) and adopted in our Order.

By Order dated September 23, 2002, we found that Northern had not met the performance standard for the months of May and June 2002 and assessed a penalty of \$5,000 for each month. We further directed Northern to work with the Director of the Consumer Assistance Division to develop a modified IVR messaging system or call response standard for approval and implementation by October 1, 2002.<sup>1</sup>

The Director of CAD reports that a mutually acceptable revised IVR message system and measurement starting point have been developed and are presented for our approval.

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<sup>1</sup> We did not impose similar penalties for July, August, and September to provide Northern sufficient time to adjust its messaging system script as necessary to meet the standard.

### III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The parties to this proceeding jointly propose to revise the text of Northern's credit and collection line messaging system to streamline the messages a caller receives and to establish a revised performance measurement starting point. No change is proposed to the interim standard for Northern's credit and collection line of at least 80% of all calls from customers answered by a live customer representative within 30 seconds and the related penalty structure.

Since we last deliberated this matter, we have explored the need for the second message in Northern's call answer system. Northern explains that its IVR system is configured to forward calls directly into the service representative queue when incoming calls exceed the IVR system's capacity. These overflow calls bypass Northern's initial greeting message. Consequently, a second greeting message in the queue is necessary to acknowledge these callers. If Northern were to eliminate this bypass feature, overflow callers would receive a busy signal preventing them from reaching Northern.

We find Northern's current practice of directing overflow calls into its service representative's queue to be the preferable option. Moreover, while Northern's system will contain two messages, the message content has been streamlined to result in a shorter waiting time before callers are placed into the queue to reach a live person than was the case previously. Attachment A to this Order contains the specific revised text of Northern's call answer system. Changing the performance measurement starting point from the IVR menu selection point to the end of the second message is also consistent with our call response performance measurement goals.<sup>2</sup>

We find these modifications acceptable. They reduce customer waiting time while delivering necessary information. They also establish a clear performance measurement starting point.

### IV. CONCLUSION

We approve the revised IVR messages and performance measurement starting point for Northern's credit and collection line for implementation on October 1, 2002.

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<sup>2</sup> This was previously specified as "beginning at the point a caller makes a service selection and ending at the point that a representative in the service area selected by the caller answers the call," based on the understanding that the system had only one message.

Dated at Augusta, Maine, this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of October, 2002.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION

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Dennis L. Keschl  
Administrative Director

COMMISSIONERS VOTING FOR:      Welch  
   Nugent  
   Diamond

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5 M.R.S.A. § 9061 requires the Public Utilities Commission to give each party to an adjudicatory proceeding written notice of the party's rights to review or appeal of its decision made at the conclusion of the adjudicatory proceeding. The methods of review or appeal of PUC decisions at the conclusion of an adjudicatory proceeding are as follows:

1. Reconsideration of the Commission's Order may be requested under Section 1004 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure (65-407 C.M.R.110) within 20 days of the date of the Order by filing a petition with the Commission stating the grounds upon which reconsideration is sought.
2. Appeal of a final decision of the Commission may be taken to the Law Court by filing, within **21 days** of the date of the Order, a Notice of Appeal with the Administrative Director of the Commission, pursuant to 35-A M.R.S.A. § 1320(1)-(4) and the Maine Rules of Appellate Procedure.
3. Additional court review of constitutional issues or issues involving the justness or reasonableness of rates may be had by the filing of an appeal with the Law Court, pursuant to 35-A M.R.S.A. § 1320(5).

Note: The attachment of this Notice to a document does not indicate the Commission's view that the particular document may be subject to review or appeal. Similarly, the failure of the Commission to attach a copy of this Notice to a document does not indicate the Commission's view that the document is not subject to review or appeal.

Attachment A

The revised IVR/ACD script for implementation by October 1, 2002:

Thank you for calling Bay State Gas and Northern Utilities. We accept Gas leak emergencies 24 hours a day at 1-800-525-8222.

For balance and payment information, please press 1

All residential and commercial customers who have received a shut off notice for today or if your property has been posted for shut off, please press 2

If your service is not scheduled for disconnection today and you wish to make a payment arrangement, please press 3

Otherwise, please press "0" or stay on the line for a customer service representative.

(Rings)

Thank you for calling Bay State Gas/Northern Utilities. Your call is being recorded for quality assurance. Please stay on the line and we will answer the call in the order we receive them.